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# **Jung at the Foot of Mount Kailash: A Transpersonal Synthesis of Depth Psychology, Tibetan Tantra, and the Sacred Mythic Imagery of East and West**

*Judson Davis*

California Institute of Integral Studies  
San Francisco, CA, USA

Tibetan Buddhist Tantra and Jungian depth psychology represent two of the world's more dynamic psycho-spiritual traditions. This comparative study explores their respective insights, cosmologies, and often striking similarities, with particular emphasis on the manner in which mythic imagery is employed in both disciplines as a powerful agent of healing and transformation. The ontological status of Tibetan deities and archetypal entities is also given careful consideration, especially in relation to the phenomena of psychic projection and autonomous spiritual dimensions.

**Keywords:** *Jungian psychology, Tibetan Tantra, integral scholarship, transpersonal, archetypal dimension, dream yoga, participatory event*

Jungian psychology and Tibetan Tantra share a number of characteristics and methodologies that have as their primary focus the treatment of human suffering and the elicitation of spiritual awakening. Each tradition arose in a very different historical period and socio-cultural context, which makes these various overlapping aspects all the more compelling.

These two transformative disciplines—one revealing the wisdom of an ancient Eastern spiritual tradition and the other the insights of a contemporary Western psychological framework—are linked most readily through their shared emphasis on the creative use of mythic imagery as a dynamic means of effecting spiritual development. With transcendence acting as their primary focus, both traditions emphasize the mind, or psyche, as the foundational basis of existence and the primary means through which liberation (in the tantric tradition) and psychic wholeness (in Jungian psychology) is pursued. Each emphasizes the realm of dreams (e.g., dream analysis in depth psychology and dream yoga in Tibetan Tantra), meditative visualizations (such as the focus on wisdom figures in both disciplines), and an assortment of other practices that, at their very essence, are designed to effect a reconciliation of opposites and the attendant union of masculine and feminine elements.

It should be noted that both of these disciplines represent complex psychological systems that possess their

own distinctive characteristics and include sometimes widely varying notions of a higher spiritual order or ultimate reality (the apparent incongruity between the Jungian Self and the Buddhist “no-Self” being a primary example), but an in-depth explication concerning their respective metaphysical postulations is not the purpose of this study. Rather, it is my intention to examine how mythic imagery is used in both traditions as a means of inducing transpersonal experience, and how such experiences affect and transform human consciousness. In this sense, regardless of the differences in ontological or epistemological pronouncements, it can be said that both systems are committed to the treating and healing of human suffering as well as the inducement of spiritual awakening through transformative methodologies that share a number of intriguing characteristics. In addition, each discipline emphasizes a radical shift away from the ego as the center of one's identity toward the realization of an inseparable interrelationship with a boundless and all-encompassing psychic matrix. And within this context, it is essential to understand that in each tradition “the psyche or mind of the individual—the only instrument through which one experiences reality—is the sole authority” (Moacanin, 2003, pp. 102-103).

In the spirit of integral scholarship, Western and Eastern accounts of numinous states of consciousness, findings from modern transpersonal research, and

elements of my own personal, therapeutic, and mystical experience are integrated in this study, especially when these aspects serve to enhance a given example or theoretical component. This is done in recognition of the need for

a scholarship that realizes that these religious worlds are not dead corpses that we can dissect and analyze from a safe distance, but rather are vital, living bodies of knowledge and practice that have the potential to change completely our taken-for-granted notions of who we are, why we are here and what we could or should become. (Gunnlaugson, 2005, pp. 333-334)

The importance of integrating one's own deeply transformative experiences into any related course of study is highlighted in Jeffrey Kripal's (2001) emphasis upon a mystical hermeneutic, as "the modern, and now post-modern, study of mysticism... has been largely inspired, sustained, and rhetorically formed by the unitive, ecstatic, visionary, and mystico-hermeneutical experiences of the scholars themselves" (p. 3). Accordingly, in this study, for example, one of my own highly transformative mystical experiences serves as the starting point for an exploration of the ontological status of autonomous dimensions and psychic projections.

The integration of such material presents both potential benefits (e.g., the elucidation of theory through direct experience) and pitfalls (e.g., the potential for personal projection and cultural appropriation), and these important considerations can be approached with greater clarity when considered through Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1989) notion of a horizon, which he described as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (p. 271). The spiritual and theoretical horizons of both disciplines are thus explored in relation to their respective vantage points, a process that inevitably unfolds within the context of one's own particular insights and experience. In this sense, understanding is not conceived as a final or fixed truth, but rather as an enhanced, deepened, and fluid perspective that reflects the fruits of such a dialogical inquiry—and its fusion of horizons—between observer, lens, and texts. This is precisely the spirit in which this comparative study unfolds, and as such it is intended as a concerted form of cross-fertilization, or creative dialogical hermeneutics.

## **Jungian Depth Psychology**

Jungian psychology grew out of the depth psychological movement that was initiated by Sigmund Freud in late nineteenth-century Europe. In contrast to Freud's spiritually reductionist psychoanalysis, Jung (1963) came to understand the human psyche as possessing a religious function whereby archetypal symbols—as revealed through the unconscious and as manifested through dreams, myth, and creative expression—inform and guide human spiritual development on both a personal and collective level.

Jung was also fascinated by and readily acknowledged what he viewed as the superior development of various ancient Eastern spiritual traditions, and was especially intrigued with what he described as "the self-liberating power of the introverted mind" (1992a, p. 56). He wrote a number of essays on various aspects of Asian esotericism, including *The Psychology of Eastern Meditation*, psychological commentaries on *The Tibetan Book of Great Liberation* and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and a foreword to D. T. Suzuki's *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. Jung was particularly drawn to the manner in which certain Eastern disciplines emphasize the reconciliation of opposites and the union of male and female aspects. He also saw in these traditions a direct link to a primary component in his own evolving psychological theory—the notion of *unus mundus*. This term, which derives from his studies of medieval philosophy, translates as "one unitary world" and represents the original, inseparable union of all things, the non-differentiated essence out of which all things arise and are given individual form (Jung, 1963).

The nature of *unus mundus* was conceived as manifesting into separate parts such as subject and object in order to bring forth a condition of actuality from the potentiality inherent in the original, non-differentiated essence. Jung (1963) applied this concept to his study of the human psyche, and conceived that the differentiation of the conscious and unconscious contents of the psyche (i.e., separate parts or opposites) is necessary for the sake of growth and adaptation, but ultimately these aspects must be reunited in order to achieve a state of psychic wholeness. Central to this course of development (i.e., the individuation process) and its circuitous return to the origin of one's being (i.e., the Self) is the concept of archetypes, the primordial psychic structures that guide human development and serve as the basis of humanity's inherent religious instinct.

### Tibetan Buddhist Tantra

Buddhism, with its origins in the Indian subcontinent, arrived in Tibet in the seventh century C.E. during the reign of King Songsten Gampo (Pal, 1990). There it merged, sometimes contentiously, with the native animistic and shamanistic tradition (later known as Bon), which it would eventually supersede as the primary religious discipline. The new religion would retain, however, many of the existing indigenous beliefs and practices, and through this integration and development “all native gods already inhabiting the local mountains, the forests, the lakes and rivers, the sky, and the underworld were adopted into the pantheon and made protectors of the Buddhist religion” (pp. 42-43).

The renowned mystic Padmasambhava and the great monk Santarakshita made significant contributions toward the acceptance and expansion of this new religious system, and in about the year 779 it became officially indoctrinated through the founding of the first great monastery at Samye. The tantric form of Indian Buddhism that developed in Tibet is known in Sanskrit as Vajrayana, the Thunderbolt or Diamond Vehicle, and involves the use of such contemplative practices as meditation, creative visualization, artistic expression, mantra recitation, and the enactment of mudras (ritual poses) as a means of facilitating spiritual development and ultimate liberation. The body is regarded as an essential component in this process, and through the activation of the vital energies of the chakras, plays a central role as a kind of alchemical container of inner transformation. These various methods, practices, and rituals all share one ultimate aim—the awakening to dharmakaya, the ultimate nature of the fully enlightened mind.

Each of Tibetan Buddhism’s four primary schools (Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu, and Gelugpa) is aligned with specific lineages, tantras (texts), doctrines, and practices that are designed to correspond to the particular needs and circumstances of its respective practitioners (Powers, 1995/2007). Although differences exist concerning each order’s tantric practices, these four schools naturally share many common Buddhist precepts, including an adherence to the teachings of the Middle Way School of Nagarjuna and devotion to the bodhisattva ideal of Mahayana Buddhism, with its emphasis on the treatment and cessation of human suffering. Each also aligns itself with the precept of reincarnation as well as the cosmological notion of autonomous spiritual realms,

for which the three primary realms of desire, form, and formlessness constitute the most basic structure (there are other more thorough distinctions, such as the six or thirty-one realms of the Kalacakra system; human beings inhabit the desire realm, which involves existence in a state of samsara). According to the present Dalai Lama, these various dimensions are inhabited by other conscious entities of widely varying characteristics:

Basically we can say there are different worlds, different experiences; human life is just one of them. What we usually call spirits are some different form of life, beings who have a different body and mentality. Within the desire realm, and more specifically within the environment inhabited by human beings, there is quite a variety of other entities.... And they’re all cohabitating with us right here. (Varela, 1997, p. 141)

The various Tibetan sects also share the notion that emptiness (Skt., *shunyata*) is the essential truth of all existence, and within this context “all four orders agree that the mind is of the nature of clear light...and all agree that the most subtle and basic level of mind is of the nature of pure luminosity and emptiness” (Powers, 1995/2007, p. 358). This state of blissful, nondual emptiness is the ultimate goal of tantric practice, and concurrent with an awakening into *shunyata* arise two vital manifestations, wisdom (Skt., *prajna*) and compassion (Skt., *karuna*), which are considered the two most essential qualities resulting from the attainment of this fully liberated state. Humility and simplicity are also highly valued, and in this sense “being a Buddha is not being some omnipotent spiritual superman, but becoming at last a true human being” (Sogyal, 1994, p. 54).

### Comparative Analysis

Jungian psychology and Tibetan Tantra both employ a variety of dynamic methodologies that foster healing and accentuate spiritual development and awakening. As previously stated, both disciplines emphasize the transformative power of mythic imagery and the reconciliation of opposites as a means of facilitating human development, and in each discipline these processes are understood as vital catalysts for the inducement of numinous and mystical experience (Moacanin, 2003). Each also places crucial emphasis on the union of feminine and masculine elements, as revealed in the following passage:

The union of masculine and feminine is central to much of life, both inwardly and outwardly. The conjunctio, as Jung called this union, is equally important to the completion stage of tantra, where male and female aspects of the meditator are brought into union on an inner level. (Preece, 2006, p. 215)

This emphasis on the union of opposites also applies directly to the light and dark aspects of human nature, and in Tibetan Tantra, as in certain primary practices in depth psychotherapy, visualization plays a primary role in this process:

In Jungian analysis one must deal with one's shadow, the dark rejected part of the psyche; one must detect projections and egocentric aims.... For that reason the total psyche must be approached, its dark as well as its light aspects, personified in tantra by peaceful and wrathful deities repeatedly constructed and dissolved in one's visualization. One is continually facing the conflict of opposites in an effort to transcend them. This is the purpose of the sadhanas (meditation exercises), which are based on a profound understanding of what Jung would call depth psychology. (Moacanin, 2003, pp. 88-89)

Regarding this integration of opposing psychic forces, Jung (1963) believed that the image of the Buddha was a more complete representation of the total human being because it integrated both the light and dark aspects of human nature, whereas in the Christian tradition the image of Christ was depicted in purely benign form, with the dark aspects being split off and assigned to the figure of the Devil.

The creative engagement of god-images and other sacred symbols (e.g., the mandala) holds special significance in each tradition, both as a means of facilitating spiritual development and as a process that points directly to an essential precept that lies at the foundation of each system—the primacy of psychic reality. Both the Buddhist and Jungian disciplines variously stress an empirical approach in their understanding of the human mind, and each emphasizes the importance of a direct experiential comprehension of spiritual processes while avoiding definitive metaphysical postulations (Clarke, 1994). At the same time, each system posits the intimate interrelationship of all phenomena, and this notion of inseparable union, of the ultimate interconnectedness between all things and processes, is especially relevant

as it pertains to the psychic relationship between subject and object, observer and observed. This is particularly well demonstrated in the texts of the Tibetan tradition, as Clarke astutely observed regarding *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*:

the emphasis throughout the treatise is on the doctrine that the only reality is mind or consciousness, and that all things, including material reality, are mind-made. Furthermore, all minds, and hence all existing things, are manifestations of the Absolute or One Mind. (p. 127)

The reading of this enigmatic Buddhist text provided Jung (1992b) with what he felt was significant validation for his own theories of psychic reality:

The whole book is created out of the archetypal contents of the unconscious. Behind these there lie—and in this our Western reason is quite right—no physical or metaphysical realities, but “merely” the reality of psychic facts, the data of psychic experience.... The Bardo Thodol says no more than this, for its five Dhyani-Buddhas are no more than psychic data.... The world of gods and spirits is truly “nothing but” the collective unconscious inside me. (p. 96)

Lama Yeshe, in referring to the process of tantric meditation, expressed a similar perspective when he stated that “such a deity is an archetype of our own deepest nature, our most profound level of consciousness” (1987/2001, p. 30). In *The Psychology of Eastern Meditation*, Jung (1936/1958) again emphasized this shared principle when he expressed the following:

In the meditation it is realized that the Buddha is really nothing other than the activating psyche of the yogi—the meditator himself. It is not only that the image of the Buddha is produced out of “one's own mind and thought,” but that the psyche which produces these thought-forms is the Buddha himself. (p. 567)

Clarke (1994) further observed that Jung's exposure to Eastern spiritual traditions helped him to more fully develop his theory of introversion and extroversion, and it was through such exposures that Jung (1992a) came to understand the Asian disciplines as possessing “a typically introverted point of view, contrasted with the equally typical extraverted point of view of the West” (p. 53). In Jung's thinking,



the extroverted tendency of the West is most readily exemplified by its exaggerated emphasis upon rationalism and scientific materialism (at the expense of contact with the archetypal unconscious), and he was greatly concerned that this imbalance had substantially diminished contemporary Western humanity's sense of inner meaning, resulting in a deeply engrained spiritual malaise. This pervasive disconnection from the core of one's inner world is a primary theme of many Tibetan masters as well, including Sogyal Rinpoche (1994), who described this condition as "perhaps the darkest and most disturbing aspect of modern civilization—its ignorance and repression of who we really are" (p. 52).

Both traditions are primarily concerned, then, with a proper understanding of the nature and workings of the human mind, and the depth and clarity of this understanding is thought to have a direct correlation with both spiritual development and the cessation of psychic suffering. It warrants mention, however, that whereas in the Tibetan tradition the achievement of enlightenment is accompanied by an end to suffering, for Jung (1963) the process of individuation involves an endless course of development of which suffering remains an unceasing—and even necessary—component. In this sense he could not conceive of a state of complete liberation, and concurrently could not accept the Eastern notion of an egoless, non-dual, unitary state of heightened consciousness:

Consciousness is inconceivable without an ego; it is equated with the relation of contents to an ego. If there is no ego there is nobody to be conscious of anything.... The Eastern mind, however, has no difficulty in conceiving of a consciousness without an ego. Consciousness is deemed capable of transcending its ego condition; indeed, in its "higher" forms, the ego disappears altogether. Such an egoless mental condition can only be unconscious to us, for the simple reason that there would be nobody to witness it.... I cannot imagine a conscious mental state that does not relate to a subject, that is, to an ego. (Jung, 1992a, p. 56)

Despite this incongruity with the Eastern view, Jung aligned his concept of the Self with Buddhism's Universal Mind, and stated that "the unconscious is the root of all experience of oneness... dharmakaya" (p. 66).

Finally, no comparative study of these two disciplines would be complete without some mention of their mutual association with the esoteric phenomena

of chakras. Jung had received an initial exposure to this fundamental tenet of Hindu and Buddhist tantric practice through J. G. Woodroffe's *The Serpent Power*, and it was through tantric yoga that "Jung discovered certain symbolic parallels with his own conception of psychic libido and with the general goal of psychic integration" (Clarke, 1994, p. 75). This discipline, which is especially prominent in the Tibetan tradition, appealed to Jung because it represented a system that integrated psychic and somatic factors, involved the manifestation of symbolic material indicative of the stages of spiritual development (as variously arising in the seven vital energy centers), and was holistic in that it offered a "positive, life-affirming view of the body, the passions, and the shadowy regions of the psyche" (p. 111). In the activation of the chakras one again finds precepts common to both disciplines, for the attendant meditative techniques are designed to stimulate the female principle, or kundalini, and "to raise it from the lowest to the highest chakra, there to be united with the male principle, a union which brings about a state of supreme bliss beyond all dualities" (pp. 110-111).

#### **Jung, Dreams, and Archetypes of the Numinous**

Having established a basic framework of overlapping similarities between the two traditions, the focus now turns to an outline of pertinent Jungian psychological perspectives and their emphasis upon the healing and transformative aspects of the human psyche, a process that ultimately leads to a greater elucidation of Tibetan Tantra as well. Here the relationship of numinous experience becomes especially relevant, as such experiences represent breakthroughs into considerably broader, unfathomable psychic realms that serve to greatly influence and instruct human spiritual development:

Numinous experience is...the feeling that one is in the grip something greater than oneself, the impossibility of exercising criticism, and the paralysis of the will. Under the impact of the experience reason evaporates and another power simultaneously takes control—a most singular feeling which one willy-nilly hoards up as a secret treasure no matter how much one's reason may protest. That, indeed, is the uncomprehended purpose of the experience—to make us feel the overpowering presence of a mystery. (Jung, 1977, pp. 154-155)

An in-depth attunement to the mythic images that arise through dreams, visions, and other psychic

phenomena represents an essential component in this process, as such archetypal forms often evoke (or are used to induce) the experience of numinosity (Jung, 1974). The phenomena of dreams are of particular importance in depth psychology “because dreams are the most common and most normal expression of the unconscious psyche...they provide the bulk of the material for its investigation” (p. 73). Jung also made an important distinction “between ‘little’ and ‘big’ dreams, or as we might say, ‘insignificant’ and ‘significant’ dreams” (p. 76). One such dream that is of particular relevance came to Jung in his middle years and proved to be instrumental in the creation of an expanded dialogical relationship with the Self:

I had dreamed once before of the problem of the self and the ego....I was walking along a little road through a hilly landscape; the sun was shining and I had a wide view in all directions. Then I came to a small wayside chapel. The door was ajar, and I went in. To my surprise there was no image of the virgin on the altar, and no crucifix either, but only a wonderful flower arrangement. But then I saw that on the floor in front of the altar, facing me, sat a yogi—in lotus posture, in deep meditation. When I looked at him more closely, I realized that he had my face. I started in profound fright, and awoke with the thought: ‘Aha, so he is the one who is meditating me. He has a dream, and I am it.’ I knew that when he awakened, I would no longer be. (1963, p. 323).

Jung (1963) stressed that the purpose of such dreams is “to effect a reversal of the relationship between ego-consciousness and the unconscious, and to represent the unconscious as the generator of the empirical personality” (p. 324). He chose to experiment with various techniques designed to help manifest the interplay between consciousness and the unconscious, and he viewed creative expression as an especially effective means of facilitating this process. In conjunction with his discoveries, Jung developed the process of amplification, a method by which the deeper spiritual meanings of psychic images, symbols, and dream-figures are expanded through their association with mythological, cultural, and religious metaphors—a process that has particular application within a therapeutic and developmental context.

The psyche’s direct engagement with mythic imagery thus represents one of the most essential

features of this alchemical healing process, as it signals “a movement out of the suspension between opposites, a living birth that leads to a new level of being, a new situation . . . a quality of conjoined opposites” (Jung, 1960, p. 90). This phenomenon is well represented through the following dream (one of my own) and the process of psychic amplification that followed:

I am standing in a room and am engaged in a conversation that reveals with great certainty that at a later date I will be involved in the dissemination of Jung’s theories to a wider audience. This realization is accompanied by a strong sense of personal pride at the prospect of personal accomplishment and recognition in the outer world. Then I suddenly pass through a curtain and find myself on a football field preparing to kick a field goal that will signify my success in this endeavor, but when I kick the ball, it hits the goal post, and falls short. Then I wake up.

I was left with the undeniable sense that this dream had special significance, and at the same time was confused by the seemingly contradictory messages that it provided. So, intent upon uncovering its deeper meaning, I chose to engage in the practice of active imagination, an imaginal exercise created by Jung in which one reenters the dream in a conscious state by focusing upon a primary image and then allowing the inner drama to unfold of its own accord. In this case, the goal post was clearly the most prominent figure, and so, with this image firmly in mind, I proceeded to close my eyes, concentrate my focus, and then experienced the following:

In a short time I found myself again on the football field, this time playing quarterback. Each time I tried to pass the ball, I was quickly tackled. Finally, I decided to keep the ball and attempt to cross the goal line by my own volition, and was then able to maneuver my way through the defense, ultimately being brought down as I successfully crossed the goal line. As the football I was carrying touched the ground, it suddenly turned into an enlarged, glowing blue diamond, and this was accompanied by a wordless, telepathic communication that can only be described as a numinous revelation, one that arose from a deeper part of myself that I rarely have direct access to, and yet somehow instinctively know to be my true self. And what this communication

revealed to me was that the goal in life is not about achieving success or status in the outer world, but rather, the true meaning of this life is to reconnect, to return home, to the very source of one's being.

This experience clearly delineates Jung's (1960) notion of the dynamic interplay between consciousness and the unconscious. It also appears to be highly suggestive of the existence of numinous universal archetypes, as the diamond exists as one of the primary representations of the Self (Jung, 1964), and has manifested as a sacred symbol of spiritual radiance, purity, and indestructibility in an array of diverse cultural traditions, including Tibetan Buddhist Tantra, or Vajrayana—the Diamond Vehicle.

These psychic processes also serve to exemplify the means by which the unconscious acts in a regulatory capacity, compensating for the misguided direction of the ego through the spontaneous manifestation of psychic imagery, a process that combines aspects of one's contemporary personal existence (i.e., the goal post) with the universal symbolic imagery of the collective unconsciousness (i.e., the blue diamond), resulting in an experience of deep personal meaning and psychic wholeness (Jung, 1960).

Jung (1963) stated that specific archetypal symbols manifest in direct correlation with one's spiritual development, and observed that as the Self increasingly assumes a central position within consciousness, the mandala becomes the most prominent and consistent symbol. An important bridge is thus established here between the Western and Eastern traditions in question, especially as it pertains to the arising and manifestation of mythic imagery in a broader universal context:

The mandala is an archetypal image whose occurrence is attested throughout the ages. It signifies the wholeness of the self. The circular image represents the wholeness of the psychic ground or, to put it in mythic terms, the divinity incarnate in man... which spontaneously arises in the mind as a representation of the struggle and reconciliation of opposites. (pp. 334-335)

Jung (1974) further enunciated this theme as follows:

It seems to me beyond question that these Eastern symbols originated in dreams and visions, and were not invented by some Mahayana church father. On the contrary, they are among the oldest religious

symbols of humanity... and may even have existed in Paleolithic times.... The mandalas used in ceremonial are of great significance because their centers usually contain one of the highest religious figures: either Shiva himself—often in the embrace of Shakti—or the Buddha, Amitabha, Avalokiteshvara, or one of the great Mahayana teachers, or simply the dorje, symbol of all the divine forces together, whether creative or destructive. (pp. 170-172)

The above passages clearly exemplify the central themes mentioned previously, namely the essential importance of the reconciliation of opposites and the attendant union of male/female aspects, a process that is accompanied by the manifestation of various forms of universal mythic imagery that appear both in individual spiritual development and in broader cultural and religious contexts. This notion is echoed by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche (1998), who touched upon this phenomenon as follows:

The underlying truth is that these teaching arise spontaneously from humans when they reach a certain point in their individual development. The teachings are inherent in the foundational wisdom that any culture can eventually access. They are not only Buddhist or Bon teachings; they are teachings for all humans. (p. 71)

### **Tibetan Tantra:**

#### **Dreams, Sacred Imagery, and Mythic Realms**

Both Jungian psychology and Tibetan Tantra emphasize spiritual transformation, and both engage in imaginal practices that are intended to directly influence this process. Dream yoga represents one of the primary practices in the Tibetan tradition, and reflects “how greatly dream is valued in Tibetan culture... and how information from the unconscious is often of greater value than the information the conscious mind can provide. (Wangyal, 1998, p. 12) However, in considering the manner in which the tantric tradition employs such practices, an important distinction must be made:

There is nothing more real than dream. This statement only makes sense once it is understood that normal waking life is as unreal as dream, and in exactly the same way. Then it can be understood that dream yoga applies to all experience, to the dreams of the day as well as the dreams of the night. (p. 23)



The above passage relates to the Tibetan Buddhist view (and broader Indian notion) of maya, which refers to the illusory nature of ordinary dualistic perception. Genuine clarity of mind, on the other hand, involves the immediate, penetrating, nondual comprehension that “the very ground of our being is pervasive, self-existing, empty, primordial awareness. . . . Bon-Buddhism places a great emphasis on the doctrine of no-self or emptiness (sunyata), which is the ultimate truth of all phenomena” (Wangyal, 1998, p. 200). Within this mode of perception, all phenomena, both in the waking and dream state, are understood to be lacking in any inherent existence, and as such the conventional self, the separate “me” that one normally identifies with, is understood to be a projection of the mind that is not abiding in its true nature, known in Tibetan Buddhism as the “clear light of bliss,” and in the Tibetan language as rigpa. Learning not to falsely identify with illusory projections, which in Buddhism are seen as arising from one’s karmic traces and perpetuating the cycle of rebirth in samsara, is a fundamental aspect of this discipline. Accordingly, such methods as deity visualizations, dream yoga, and other meditative practices are intended to dissolve the dualistic mind into

the clear light and abide in it through all the moments of life: waking, meditating, dreaming, sleeping, and death. Essentially, the teaching are designed to help us recognize the nature of mind, to understand and overcome the obstacles in our practice, and to abide fully in rigpa. We can utilize the same methods to remain in joy, to find peace in the midst of the turmoil of the world, to live well and to appreciate each vivid moment of our human existence. (p. 208)

To abide in the clear light, then, in the waking state, during meditation, in the bardo (which is given particular emphasis in dream yoga), and during dreaming itself, and to approach the phenomena that one encounters in all of these states as projections of the mind while sustaining a state of calm abiding in nondual awareness—this is the essential purpose of tantric practice (Wangyal, 1998).

And so, despite the fact that in Buddhism one’s essential nature is understood as lacking any inherent existence, mythic imagery and entities (e.g., Buddha Sakyamuni, Avalokitesvara, and Tara) are employed

in various tantric methodologies as a creative means of furthering one’s spiritual development. This is done with the understanding that

the deity we choose to identify with represents the essential qualities of the fully awakened experience latent within us. To use the language of psychology, such a deity is an archetype of our own deepest nature, our most profound level of consciousness. In tantra we focus our attention upon such an archetypal image and identify with it in order to arouse the deepest, most profound aspects of our being and bring them into our present reality. (Yeshe, 1987/2001, p. 30)

Rob Preece (2006) also emphasized this important distinction when he stated that

even though the notion of no-Self (Skt., anatma) is a central tenet of Buddhism, the Buddhist tantric path conceives that our potential for wholeness is personified in the symbolic form of a deity. . . . The deity in Tantra is understood as a gateway or bridge between two aspects of reality. . . . In Buddhism we speak of ‘relative truth,’ the world of appearances and forms, and ‘ultimate truth,’ the empty, spacious, nondual nature of reality. . . . The deity stands on the threshold as the potential for creative manifestation. (pp. 38-39)

At the same time it is important to note that Tibetan Buddhist cosmology posits the existence of various spiritual dimensions and ethereal entities that are considered to be more than mere psychic projections. They are thought to possess their own autonomous nature and to exist in innumerable planes and universes, as Tulku Thongdup wrote:

Buddhist cosmology encompasses an unimaginably vast number of world systems beyond our earthly home. Outside of the mundane world, the six realms of samsara, there exist innumerable pure lands extending in all ten directions of the universe. . . . These purified paradises are the dwelling places of advanced beings, including celestial buddhas and great bodhisattvas. (2005, p. 284)

This perspective is given further support through the pioneering transpersonal findings of Stanislav Grof (1998), whose more than forty years of research into non-ordinary states of consciousness have suggested the

existence of an immense array of spiritual realms and experiential dimensions that lie beyond the perception of ordinary waking consciousness. His findings also suggest the existence of two forms of ultimate reality, which are referred to as Absolute Consciousness and Cosmic Emptiness, or the Void. Absolute Consciousness represents the supreme creative principle (which is responsible for the creation of manifest existence), and this creative principle is thought to co-exist with, and emanate from, the great Void, as outlined below:

When we encounter the Void, we feel that it is primordial emptiness of cosmic proportions and relevance. We become pure consciousness aware of this absolute nothingness; however, at the same time, we have a strange paradoxical sense of its essential fullness.... While it does not contain anything in a concrete manifest form, it seems to comprise all of existence in potential form.... The Void transcends the usual categories of space and time, and lies beyond all dichotomies and polarities, such as light and darkness, good and evil... agony and ecstasy, singularity and plurality, form and emptiness, and even existence and nonexistence.... This metaphysical vacuum, pregnant with potential for everything there is, appears to be the cradle of all being, the ultimate source of existence. The creation of all phenomenal worlds is then the realization and concretization of its pre-existing potentialities. (p. 30)

The above passage addresses a number of primary themes in Buddhist cosmology, including the Void as primordial emptiness, the reconciliation and union of all opposites (one is immediately reminded here of the famous Buddhist adage, form is emptiness, and emptiness is form), the existence of a timeless dimension, and the presence of countless world systems. It also touches upon the theme of manifest existence arising out of this Void, and Grof (1998) stated that some of these various realms and the entities that inhabit them are understood to interact with and inform our earthly dimension in ways that are consistent with aspects of Jungian psychology:

The material realm that we inhabit and with which we are intimately familiar seems to be just one of these worlds.... Of special interest is a domain that lies between our everyday reality and the undifferentiated Absolute Consciousness. It is

a mythological realm that has been extensively studied by C. G. Jung and his followers.... Jung referred to it as the archetypal realm of the collective unconscious. The beings inhabiting these realms seem to be endowed with extraordinary energy and have an aura of sacredness or numinosity. For this reason they are usually perceived and described as deities.... The encounters with mythological beings and visits to mythic landscapes... can be in every respect as real as events in our everyday life, or more so. The archetypal realm is not a figment of human fantasy and imagination; it has an independent existence of its own and a high degree of autonomy. At the same time, its dynamics seem to be intimately connected with material reality and with human life. (pp. 69-70)

It is these advanced spiritual dimensions that are sometimes accessed through the creative, meditative and dream practices emphasized in both Jungian psychotherapy and Tibetan Tantra. There exist many stories in Tibetan Buddhist literature, for example, that tell of “meditators who leave their bodies for days at a time to travel through the invisible world” (Thongdup, 2005, p. 6). These practitioners, who are known as *delogs*, then “come back to their bodies to record their extraordinary journeys, which could span the lowest rungs of hell and the sublime pure lands” (p. 6). One captivating account of just such a journey—replete with sacred mythic entities and imagery—is revealed in the following experience of a young Tibetan woman:

Dawa Drolma felt that she moved through the sky, soaring like a vulture. She found herself in the manifested pure land of Guru Rimpoche, the buddha in the form a realized master. There was a boundlessly vast field. In the center she saw a giant red rock mountain in the shape of a heart. The mountain was surrounded by many sharp, sword-like mountains, all shining with a reddish color. The sky was adorned with a canopy of five colored rainbow light. All kinds of beautiful birds were singing and playing joyfully. The ground was covered with flowers of all kinds and colors. The whole atmosphere was filled with an amazing sweet fragrance that overwhelmed all her senses. There was also a blue mountain, as if made of sapphire. These were not vague appearances, but vivid images with real presence.... In the middle of the mountain, she saw the inconceivable palace

of Guru Rimpoche called the Lotus of Light. The palace was the enlightened wisdom of Guru Rimpoche himself, spontaneously appearing in the form of a luminous mansion of light. ... This pure land was filled with masters, dakas, and dakinis. ... Accompanied by White Tara, Dawa Drolma entered into another inconceivably beautiful palace, made as if of red crystal. ... In the middle of a great hall, Dawa Drolma saw an enormous throne—higher, it seemed to her, than a three-story building. ... On that throne she beheld the amazing presence of Guru Rimpoche, Padmasambhava, the embodiment of the wisdom, compassion, and power of the enlightened ones. ... Dawa Drolma drew closer to the throne and touched her forehead to the feet of Guru Rimpoche. ... Guru Rimpoche bestowed upon her empowerments and blessings. With great compassion, he said... “Tell people what you saw and entreat them to pursue virtue”.... Then White Tara led Dawa Drolma to the hell realms. Dawa Drolma journeyed through the experiences of the bardo. She saw the Dharma King of the Lords of the Dead in wrathful and terrifying form in his Court of Judgment. ... She also saw the results of karmic effects and the severity of sufferings of the hell realms with her naked eyes, so she would be able to teach more effectively on her return to the world of the living. ... White.

Tara then took Dawa Drolma to visit Potala, the pure land of Avalokiteshvara, and Yulo Kopa, the pure land of Tara, before returning to the human world. ... Dawa Drolma spent the rest of her life teaching Dharma based on her delog experiences and totally devoting her life to the service of others. ... In 1941, at the age of thirty-two, she died. ... People witnessed many miracles at the time of her death and cremation. She and her delog accounts inspired the hearts of many people in many parts of Eastern Tibet to believe in the law of karma and rebirth. That in turn awakened a kinder nature in many. (Thongdup, 2005, pp. 151-155)

This portrayal reveals an array of mythic entities and imagery that appear to represent aspects of the practitioner’s own inner spiritual processes while at the same time revealing greatly advanced experiential dimensions. In light of the rather fantastic nature (at least in modern Western terms) of this other-worldly depiction, and in consideration of the sometimes widely differing

perspectives (i.e., psychic projection vs. autonomous dimensions) presented above concerning the phenomena of archetypal imagery and mythic realms, how is one to arrive at a distinction between where an individual’s mythic projections end and these autonomous and often greatly heightened realities begin? This question lies at the heart of a tremendous enigma, especially in relation to the many different psychic contexts (e.g., dreams, the bardo, near-death experience, and other non-ordinary states of consciousness) in which these realms and entities manifest.

Thankas and other forms of sacred art that are used in Tibetan meditative practices depict such deities, paradises, and dimensions, but in referring to these divine entities Lama Yeshe (1987) was careful to clarify that

tantric meditational deities should not be confused with what different mythologies and religions might mean when they speak of gods and goddesses. ... The deity we choose to identify with represents the essential qualities of the fully awakened experience latent within us. (p. 30)

Echoing the same perspective, Pal (1990) stated that “on a more metaphysical level, the divine images are simply symbols of the Buddha. ... They are not themselves real but help to define reality, and are dispensed with by the enlightened mind and by the true yogi” (1990, p. 36). Further, Padmasambhava’s (2005) famous instruction manual for liberation in the bardo state, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, clearly delineates the forms and entities encountered in this intermediate state as projections of one’s mind. And, as previously cited, Jung (1992b), in his commentary on the same text, asserted that “the whole book is created out of the archetypal contents of the unconscious. ... The world of gods and spirits is truly ‘nothing but’ the collective unconscious inside me” (p. 96).

And yet, as previously revealed both the Dalai Lama and Grof (in an expansion upon Jung’s initial findings) have affirmed the autonomous existence of other entities and dimensions, and Tulku Thongdup (2005) emphasized that in the Tibetan tradition rebirth into one of these paradisiacal, non-samsaric pure lands (as part of one’s spiritual evolution toward ultimate liberation) stands as a principal aim of tantric practice. Further, Jamgon Kongtrul’s (1995/2003) *The Treasury of Knowledge: Myriad Worlds* presented a comprehensive

overview of world-systems and the various beings who inhabit them. In the latter years of his life even Jung, who in adherence to Kantian epistemology was always careful not to draw absolute metaphysical conclusions, nonetheless considered archetypal forms and other such numinous phenomena to be strongly suggestive of an autonomous and unfathomable force possessing a profoundly multi-dimensional nature (Edinger, 1996). It is also fascinating to note that Lama Govinda (1960), in his foreword to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* that accompanies Jung's own commentary on the same text, made a point to emphasize that

animism permeates all Buddhist texts, wherein every tree and grove, and every locality, is held to have its own peculiar deities; and the Buddha is represented as discoursing with gods and other spiritual beings, inhabiting the Earth and the realms beyond, as if it were a most natural procedure. Only a completely intellectualized and Westernized Buddhism, which attempts to separate the thought-content of Buddhism from its equally profound mythological elements, can deny this animistic background and with it the metaphysical foundations of Buddhism. (p. lvii)

At first glance, then, one appears to be left with a somewhat beguiling predicament. Although I cannot claim to offer any definitive explanations regarding the apparent disparities in the above examples, an in-depth exploration of the following experience—a very mysterious encounter with a vast ethereal feminine presence many years ago at the base of Mt. Everest—may help to further clarify a distinction between personal mythic projection and the presence of autonomous archetypal realms and beings.

#### **Mystical Encounter at Mt. Everest**

The experience in question took place in the summer of 1996 and involved an overland expedition from the Tibetan capital of Lhasa to the enigmatic city of Kathmandu, Nepal. The journey was scheduled to take about a week, and would extend along what is known as the Friendship Highway, a rough, unpaved road that links these two ancient trading partners. This route took us through an array of small villages as well as a number of important religious settlements, including the monastic centers of Gyantse and Shigatse, before arriving at Rongbuk Monastery near the base camp of Mt. Everest. Throughout this passing kaleidoscope of

ancient towns and medieval villages we encountered a vast, ever-changing landscape of immeasurable mountain ranges and open, desolate plains that exuded a stark, ominous beauty. In this environment human beings find themselves in the presence of immense natural forces that dwarf the human condition. In the midst of this seemingly endless expanse of open, untamed wilderness, one's usual sense of position and importance in the world is greatly diminished and one stands humbled in the presence of an environment whose indelible scope remains an unquenchable mystery.

Our evening at the monastery was spent attending to the practical aims of food and shelter, as we had arrived well after dark and were tired and hungry after a long arduous ascent over hard and unforgiving terrain. The guest quarters were cold, sparse, and dimly lit, as were the kitchen conditions where we consumed in silence a simple bowl of buckwheat noodles while surrounded by a retinue of subdued young novice monks. Immediately after dinner I retired to my humble cot, and was soon fast asleep. Then, sometime in the middle of the night I awoke and was instinctively drawn outside and up a neighboring hillside where, upon reaching the top, I suddenly encountered the undeniable presence of an utterly vast feminine energy that seemed to blanket the sky above. I was awestruck by its combination of depth, power, and immensity, and at that moment I felt that perhaps my mother had died and that her expanded spirit was somehow visiting me. But when I expressed this thought to the sky, this notion was in no way confirmed, and later I would discover that my mother was indeed still alive, which draped this profound experience in mystery.

A few days later we arrived in the city of Kathmandu, and the next day, while strolling through the colorful, crowded side streets of this medieval metropolis, I came upon an image that immediately captured my attention and held it in a state of great attraction and curiosity. The image was of an ethereal female figure, clearly presented in the context of veneration and surrounded by a host of exotic and esoteric figures. At the time I was not well versed in the pantheon of Tibetan Buddhist deities and religious iconography, and as such I was not immediately well attuned to the fact that this enigmatic and alluring female presence, with her undeniable air of serenity and deep green coloring, was in fact the Goddess Tara, accompanied by her cohorts and astral attendants. This specific identification would



come to me at a later date; all I knew then, after first setting my eyes on her, was that she must return home with me. Upon my return to California she was carefully framed and subsequently began to assume a distinct visual presence in my living space. However, a deeper appreciation of her underlying meaning—in a broader religious context and in my own personal experience—remained largely beyond my conscious awareness until I began to encounter writings on the sacred feminine through my studies in depth psychology and Tibetan Buddhism.

Through this process I began to more fully appreciate that within the context of the archetypal feminine, one of the most prominent figures is the Goddess Tara, who, as the mother of all buddhas, exemplifies compassion, enlightened activity, and “the totally developed wisdom that transcends reason” (Moacanin, 2003, p. 63). In Jungian terms, she “represents the mother archetype. . . . she is the image of the mother who has integrated in herself all the opposites, positive and negative” (p. 63).

Tara can be viewed as belonging to a broader group of female embodiments of wisdom and divine power that include the dakini, which has on occasion been associated by Western scholars with one of Jung’s key archetypes, the anima (Moacanin, 2003). Jung (1963) placed great emphasis on the integration of the feminine aspect as well as the importance of actively embracing the natural world in a deeply spiritual and mythological framework, and in this context he viewed Nature as the supreme manifestation of the archetypal Goddess. One of Jung’s most prominent contemporaries, Erich Neumann, outlined the significance of the sacred feminine and its direct correlation to the Goddess Tara as follows:

The archetypal feminine in man unfolds like mankind itself. At the beginning stands the primeval goddess, resting in the materiality of her elementary character, knowing nothing but the secret of her womb; at the end is Tara, in her left hand the opening lotus blossom of psychic flowering, her right hand held out toward the world in a gesture of giving. Her eyes are half closed and in her meditation she turns toward the outward as well as the inner world: an eternal image of the redeeming female spirit. Both together form the unity of the Great Goddess, who, in the totality of her unfolding, fills the world from

its lowest elementary phase to its supreme spiritual transformation. (1955/1983, pp. 334-335)

And the vital role that the sacred feminine plays in the process of spiritual development was revealed by Nathan Katz in the following perspective:

The inspiration of the anima or the dakini is a call for one to look inward. As such, she is the link between the conscious and unconscious. In appearing to consciousness, the anima calls its attention to what has remained hidden; she is the door to the unconscious. (1992, p. 322)

Therefore, what appears to have remained hidden and unconscious in my own experience was a deep and abiding realization of the archetypal feminine, which was brought into direct conscious awareness through my encounter with the Goddess entity at the base of Everest. The vital link that then resulted in the all-important amplification of the above experience came through my subsequent encounter with Tara’s mythic image, as encountered in the shop in Kathmandu. This image carried tremendous power and attraction (as a personal mythic projection/association), and consequently lead to a much deeper attunement to my own unfolding spiritual processes. It also profoundly evoked the undeniable presence of a vast and autonomous spiritual entity, an utterly immense and numinous mystery that is symbolized by—and transcendent of—the image of Tara itself.

If one thus understands the deities depicted in mythic imagery as essentially symbolic representations of transcendent forces, it must also be acknowledged that these symbols nonetheless possess a potent numinous quality by virtue of their archetypal nature. In Tibetan Tantra they also denote—like the progressively advanced stages of the chakras—heightened levels of spiritual development to which inhabitants of this earthly dimension aspire. As previously noted, the Buddha is said to have interacted with otherworldly entities, and indeed the very basis of the bodhisattva ideal involves the instruction and guidance of all sentient beings in this earthly realm—and in innumerable other dimensions as well.

In his book *The Sacred Place*, Paul Devereux (2000) observed that the interaction of cosmic and earthly forces appears to be highly concentrated in certain physical environments, and it is especially pertinent



to note that throughout human history mountains in particular have been known to exist as the sacred refuge of the Goddess. This is precisely the belief that is held by the native Tibetan and Nepalese inhabitants who occupy both sides of Mt. Everest. This mountain has long been considered a sanctified entity because an array of mystical experiences and encounters with various disincarnate beings have been reported in its immediate vicinity for millennia. With this understanding in mind, the potential connection between Mt. Everest and the Goddess in my own experience deserves further in-depth consideration.

Mountains hold a special place in the religious thinking and creative iconography of the Himalayas, and Mt. Kailash in particular (located in Western Tibet) ubiquitously appears on thankas and in other forms of Buddhist and Hindu art. Like Everest, Kailash represents the archetype of the World Mountain, and in its various manifestations “this cosmic mountain may be identified with a real mountain, or it can be mythic, but it is always placed at the center of the world” (Eliade, 1992, p. 110). This sacred mountain, as a form of axis mundi, represents both a physical and spiritual entity, and, as the outer form serves to activate the inner archetype in the human psyche, it is also directly linked with the union of opposites and the psycho-somatic dynamics of the chakra system:

To Hindus and Buddhists alike Kailas is the center of the universe. It is called Meru or Sumeru, according to the oldest Sanskrit tradition, and is regarded to be not only the physical but metaphysical center of the world. And as our psychological organism is a microcosmic replica of the universe, Meru is represented by the spinal cord in our nervous system; and just as the various centers (Skt.: cakra) of consciousness are supported by and connected with the spinal cord (Skt.: meru-danda) ... in the same way Mount Meru forms the axis of the various planes of supramundane worlds. (Govinda, 1966, p. 273)

This structural cosmology serves as the very basis of the all-important Buddhist stupa, and in depth psychology the World Mountain is one of the foremost archetypes of the Self and a most powerful and evocative symbol of spiritual ascendance. It warrants repeating that “as Kailas corresponds to the spinal column, it represents the axis of the spiritual universe, rising through innumerable world planes” (Govinda, 1966, p.

276). Here one finds a direct correspondence between the presence of the axial mountain, the human chakras, and the simultaneous access to other dimensions of reality.

In Tibetan Buddhism one such reality is Khacho Shing, the Pure Land of the Dakinis, “a realm closely related to our own, yet more subtle and more intimately connected to the elemental forces of nature” (Preece, 2006, p. 248). In considering this relationship between sanctified realms and the natural world, Mircea Eliade observed that “where the sacred manifests itself in space, the real unveils itself. ... It opens communication between the cosmic planes (between earth and heaven) and makes possible ontological passage from one mode of being to another” (1957/1987, p. 63). From this perspective it seems quite probable that my experience of the Goddess was facilitated through the spiritual axis of Mt. Everest, and whether she derived from the realm of Kacho Shing, Yulo Kopa (the Pure Land of Tara), or one of the many other exalted paradises, there can be no question in my experience of her utterly advanced spiritual nature and development. In this way her emergence served to activate a deep, on-going archetypal process while simultaneously revealing a wholly expanded sense of divine potential, one that points to the existence of greatly heightened celestial or psychic realms that are, in the Buddhist tradition, major steps forward along the path to final liberation.

The multidimensional nature of this enigmatic experience presents an intriguing parallel to Jorge Ferrer’s (2002) view of transpersonal phenomena as “multilocal participatory events” (p. 117), which he conceived as containing the following principal components:

- (1) events, in contrast to intrasubjective experiences;
- (2) multilocal, in that they can arise in different loci, such as an individual, a relationship, a community, a collective identity, or a place; and (3) participatory, in that they can invite the generative power and dynamism of all dimensions of human nature to interact with a spiritual power in the co-creation of spiritual worlds. (p. 117)

This framework has a direct application to my encounter with the Goddess entity beneath Mt. Everest, as this experience involved a sacred entity (i.e., the Goddess), sacred place (i.e., Mt. Everest), and a co-creative element (i.e., one’s shared participation/interaction). As a multi-local, multi-dimensional event, it is clearly indicative of the participatory vision.

The participatory perspective suggests that human consciousness acts as “the agent of religious knowing” (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008, p. 38), a process in which all aspects of perception—imaginal, somatic, intuitive, aesthetic, and rational—can potentially participate in unison with the Mystery in the unfolding and bringing forth of spiritual realities. One is thus encouraged to “recognize the ontologically creative role of spiritual cognition,” and to carefully consider the notion that “these worlds are not statically closed but fundamentally dynamic and open to the continued transformation resulting (at least in part) from the creative impact of human visionary imagination” (p. 32). In this sense, both psychic projections and autonomous dimensions, along with a array of other mysterious spiritual phenomena, can be understood as representing varying manifestations of this co-creative process. And the participatory perspective accordingly suggests that indeed these various phenomena are each valid and ontologically real in their own right.

#### **Jung at the Foot of Mt. Kailash**

Co-creative, participatory aspects are prominent in both Jungian psychology and Tibetan Tantra. In the Jungian tradition, practices such as active imagination (as previously discussed) can serve to profoundly amplify primary dream images from the unconscious. In Tibetan Tantra, meditations upon deities such as Tara similarly act as a kind of psychic bridge to the threshold of expanded dimensions. But the spiritual heights to which each discipline aspires vary in significant ways, and it is through a more thorough consideration of the chakras that further distinctions between the two systems emerge.

Jung felt that the extroverted nature of contemporary Westerners, with its focus on the primacy of exterior existence, had caused the broader culture to remain at the levels of the second and third chakras. These levels emphasize respectively the sexual nature of existence (in its procreative as opposed to its transformational potentiality), and competition and conquest, especially in the financial, military and erotic spheres (Campbell, 1986). And though all of the chakras play an important role in the process of human development, the last three levels are especially relevant to spiritual awakening in that “the uppermost three centers are of increasingly sublimated spiritual realizations” (p. 37).

Campbell (2003) suggested that the fifth center “is the cakra of ascetic, monkish disciplines.... Those

who reach this level focus their energy into...work on one’s self, conquering one’s outward-going tendencies, turning all inward” (p. 35). Jung himself described this level as involving “a full recognition of the psychical essences of substances as the fundamental essences of the world, and not by virtue of speculation but by virtue of experience” (quoted in Clarke, 1994, p. 115). This perspective exemplifies the core of Jung’s notion of the primacy of psychic reality, but he had little to say in relation to the two remaining levels. A number of contemporary scholars, including Alan Watts, Ken Wilber, and Harold Coward, have speculated that Jung’s own experiential horizon, while revealing tremendous insights in its own right, did not allow him to adequately comprehend the Eastern principle of non-dual awareness. This is due to the fact that he could not conceive of a conscious state independent of the ego and its dualistic subject-object relationship. Indeed, Jung considered the psychic stages represented by the last two chakras—especially the awakened non-dual state of the seventh chakra—to be levels that existed beyond any notion of human consciousness. In this sense he referred to chakra six as a state in which “the ego disappears completely,” and he considered chakra seven to be “beyond possible experience” (p. 115). Thus, from a Tibetan Buddhist standpoint, Jung’s own spiritual path never lead him to the unconquerable view of the Mountaintop. Although his journey took him to considerable heights, he never did make the final ascent of the World Mountain (the Self), but instead came to rest at the foot of Mt. Kailash, where he stood gazing at its objectified, mythic proportions, rather than merging with its unified, definitive totality.

Of course the most fundamental teachings of Tibetan Buddhism assert that not only are these two upper levels of the chakras attainable, but that the seventh chakra, as the very mode of dharmakaya itself, represents one’s true nature as all-encompassing, undifferentiated, non-dual awareness. This signifies an ecstatic, unitary, timeless state that defies all rational conception, “representing a rapture beyond any god known as of a name or form” (Campbell, 1986, p. 37). For it is at the level of chakra seven that “both the beheld image and the beholding mind dissolve together in a blaze that is at once of nonbeing and of being” (p. 39). This is the unrivaled, incomparable vision from the summit of the highest peak, the ultimate horizon from which all is one and where the “I” vanishes, not into the

oblivion of the unconscious as Jung believed, but into the eternal light of supreme spiritual realization.

The meditative practices of Tibetan Tantra are, as previous noted, designed to induce psychic development toward this indomitable state, and the mythic image itself stands “at the threshold of passage from time to eternity, which is in fact the plane of reference of the metaphors of myth” (Campbell, 1986, p. 40). Concurrent with this perspective is the understanding that

this threshold is...the place of the sacred in its archetypal and symbolic manifestations. On this threshold we come into relationship with the power of archetypal intent, the forces that can shape our lives. The tantric deity occupies a central place on this threshold as a personification of that intent...Awakening our relationship to the sacred on this level has a profound influence upon our lives, because the deity is the vehicle or channel through which the power of dharmakaya manifests. (Preece, 2006, p. 137)

This threshold can be seen as the boundary between temporal, dualistic, manifest existence and the eternal, nondual, formless nature of dharmakaya, and it is the various practices of tantra, and more specifically tantric meditation, or mahamudra, that “enable a meditator to cultivate a quality of emptiness with appearance” (Preece, 2006, pp. 132-133). These exercises are intended to soften our psychosomatic boundaries, thus gradually diminishing the sense of separation between one’s solidified sense of identity and the outer environment. Ultimately this transformation reveals a dynamic alchemical process, one that serves to “make a crystal of our minds, so that there is no separation between inner and outer” (Tarthang Tulku, 1978/1990, p. 30). Liberation is thus achieved through the dissolution of a separate ego and the luminous union of observer and observed, a process that in Highest Yoga Tantra (as the final stage of practice) reveals itself as follows:

The meditator experiences the first taste of dharmakaya as clear light awareness dissolves into nonduality like a clear sky, or a drop of water dissolving into the ocean. Once this experience arises, buddhahood, it is said, is possible within this lifetime, and practitioners with this quality of awareness can, within their present bodies, complete the final stages of unification. (Preece, 2006, p. 230)

Tarthang Tulku, founder of the Nyingma Institute in Berkeley, California, described this vital process of unification as one that involves

meaning which reveals itself not in words or concepts, but in the quality of our lives, in the intrinsic beauty and value of all things. When our actions arise naturally from a celebration of living, all concepts drop away. We become meaning itself, enlightened by all existence. (1978/1990, p. 116)

### Conclusion

Tibetan Buddhist Tantra and Jungian depth psychology each represent a complex system of psycho-spiritual transformation. In addition, each views the human mind, or psyche, as the primary instrument through which the transcendence of duality is achieved. And it is precisely this experience of transcendence that is variously facilitated in both methodologies through the creative use of mythic imagery. Spiritual awakening thus exists as the ultimate aim in both disciplines, a process that is intended, in Jungian terms, to lead the individual “from the ego to the Self, from the unconscious to consciousness, from the personal to the transpersonal, the holy, the realization that the macrocosm is being mirrored in the microcosm of the human psyche” (Moacanin, 2003, p. 67). In the Tibetan tradition, the path of liberation is understood as leading to an awakening to one’s true nature—the primordial, all-pervasive, inherently empty, non-dual, clear light of bliss.

Further, although it appears that Jung’s understanding of ultimate spiritual potential did not rise to the same level as revealed in Tibetan Buddhism, he nonetheless made a profound and lasting contribution to the East-West dialogue while addressing many of contemporary culture’s most pressing issues. Foremost among these in his mind was the need for humanity to return to its inner roots, to reconnect with the powerful and ever present psychic structures that guide the process of human development. These archetypal structures reveal an inscrutable variety of deities and dimensions, the ultimate nature of which remains a profound mystery and an important subject for further inquiry. But whether they manifest as autonomous realms, psychic projections, or some other form of esoteric phenomena, the precepts and experiential findings of these two vibrant disciplines clearly suggest that psychic engagement with the sacred mythic imagery of the mind remains an essential part of psycho-spiritual growth and transcendence. In

deeply considering this profound inner process, one is reminded of the judicious counsel of Lama Govinda, who stressed that “such penetration and transformation is only possible through the compelling power of inner vision, whose primordial images or ‘archetypes’ are the formative principles of our mind” (1969, p. 91).

Jungian depth psychology and Tibetan Buddhist Tantra present an array of fascinating parallels, especially in relation to the creative and meditative use of mythic imagery as a powerful means of effecting spiritual transformation. Their respective methodologies thus represent valuable avenues through which to deepen the course of human development, ultimately laying the foundation for genuine personal and collective growth, psychic reconciliation, and further exploration within the ever mysterious process of spiritual awakening.

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### About the Author

Judson Davis is a doctoral candidate in East-West Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, California. His present work involves a synthesis of Tibetan Buddhist Tantra and Jungian depth psychology, with particular emphasis on the healing and transformative power of mythic imagery and archetypal forms.

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